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THE USES OF CONVENTION: STRAVINSKY AND HIS MODELS

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I

THE persisent vitality of conventional patterns in music has often been noted. Whatever the reasons for their original development, one advantage of their use is clear: in an art both abstract and temporal they furnish signposts to aid the listener, who can neither turn back nor pause to look around him. The danger, of course, is that the composer will use them as a crutch; and it is true that the academic conception of the forms as molds has encouraged the production of much facile and undistinguished music. But when, as during the period of the Viennese Classics, original musical thought and generally accepted procedures find not only mutual accommodation but mutual reinforcement, the results are happy for composer and audience alike.

The acceptance of conventions presents another possibility, which is my concern here. A composer may deliberately defeat the expectations aroused by the specific pattern followed; the resulting tension between the anticipated and the actual course of the music can be a source of esthetic delight. This is the way Stravinsky has used conventions — stylistic as well as narrowly "formal" — of the past, but it is important

to realize that composers of the periods of interest to him have also played with their own conventions. A look at Haydn with this in mind will, I hope, not only increase our admiration for the earlier composer's musical intelligence and wit but also throw light on what Stravinsky has been doing.

First, however, a word about one element necessarily associated with any departure from accepted norms: surprise. Certainly Haydn intended the drumbeat in the "Surprise" Symphony to shock; and no doubt Beethoven was counting on more subtle reactions of the same kind when he began a symphony on an apparent dominant seventh and a concerto with a piano solo. But can any such effect escape being greatly diminished and even nullified by successive hearings? And is it possible for audiences today, after long familiarity, to experience to any degree the sensation of violated propriety apparently calculated by the composers?

Logically the answers should be "no." But just as, in seeing a suspense-filled play for the second time, we are so caught up in the flow of events that we allow ourselves to forget that we know what is coming next, so in following a skillfully written piece of music, however familiar, we can become so intent on what we are actually hearing that we do not anticipate exactly what is to come. When shocks occur under these circumstances, they are never so violent as before, but they register their artistic effect nevertheless. (To be sure, this solution does not apply to the Beethoven examples; but listeners trained to appreciate the historical effect of the cited openings can, paradoxically, even prepare themselves here to be caught off guard.)

The element of pure surprise is, after all, of minor esthetic interest. The considerations of real importance are that a deviation from the anticipated course should tell as a musically effective contrast, and that an apparently incongruous turn of events should prove to be integrally connected with the whole. These relations may become the clearer as the more visceral manifestations of shock subside. Their appreciation requires a high degree of musical sophistication on the part of the listener, and it is enlightening to contrast the kinds of knowledge presupposed by the cases about to be discussed. Haydn, writing for an eager audience that constantly demanded new works, could reasonably assume as his ideal hearer one familiar with every detail of the style of his own day; Stravinsky has to rely on the passive, historically oriented concertgoer of the 20th century.

II

Haydn's liberties with patterns he himself had so notably helped to establish are of two kinds. On the one hand, they may arise apparently spontaneously from the exigencies of the musical material, as when motivic development recasts the recapitulation of the first movement of Op. 76, No. 1. But in other cases the composer seems deliberately to play with the form—to use the pattern itself as a subject for creative development. Such treatment is a closer analogue to Stravinsky's, and for this reason I have chosen for analysis the finale of the Quartet Op. 54, No. 2.

It is probable that no printed program accompanied the performance of a new Haydn quartet, and in any event the listing of movements was not at that time a general practice. The Adagio of the finale, then, must have found an alert listener totally unprepared, since he would have been expecting the usual fast romp. How would he have taken the Adagio? No doubt as a typical slow introduction; and if so, he would have been guilty of the first of a series of mistaken interpretations, all encouraged by the composer and cleverly ordered in such a way that the subsequent correction of each merely exposes the listener to the next error. The introductory character of the opening motif is immediately thrown into question by the exact balance of the eight-measure period that it initiates; and when this entire section is repeated, one reinterprets it, not as an introduction but as the first statement of a song form. Wrong again! It *is* an introduction, although of an unusual kind, and the real song form begins with the first violin's new development of the opening motif over the slowly unfolding 'cello arpeggio that takes shape after measure 8-bis.

The three-part song form now develops so smoothly that suspicion is allayed — until the sudden turn to minor, emphasized by a succession of three barely disguised parallel fifths. The stand on the dominant that closes this section surely heralds a return to major, and obviously to another statement of the principal theme of the song form. The major appears, it is true; but nothing can be accepted as obvious in this movement. Now, when all hope of a fast finale has been given up, a Presto begins. Was the entire Adagio, huge as it was, an introduction after all? So the course of the Presto seems to suggest as it runs through its own three-part pattern in a manner typical of the openings of many Haydn rondos. But at the point where the first theme should normally come to a full cadence, to be followed by a contrast in key or mode (see, for

example, the finale of Op. 50, No. 1) — just here the cadence is made deceptive, and it is followed by a dissolution with a pause on the dominant.

What can this mean? What follows is probably the single most original stroke in the entire movement. One might have foreseen a return to the theme of the slow song form, but surely not a reprise of the opening introductory period — a reprise at once so striking and so satisfying in effect as to bring home the realization that it was more than a mere introduction after all, since it is now bearing the weight of the recapitulation. And indeed when the expansive song of the first violin does return, it is in the nature of a coda, with its characteristic bow to the subdominant over a tonic pedal. Thus, although the design of the whole is established as a ternary Adagio with a Presto interlude, it is nevertheless unique. The apparently introductory period of the first statement assumes full thematic stature on its return; while the melody originally developed most fully is relegated to the coda.

It is useless to ask of this movement, "What 'form' is it in?" — useless but not irrelevant. Appreciation of the points discussed above requires that the listener be familiar with the conventions of the day; for the composer is constantly arousing expectations based thereon, and then defeating them — or fulfilling them in a novel way. He may even be poking fun at a pedantic insistence on regularity.

At the same time it is important to realize that he has created a new design, valid for these specific musical materials and comprehensible without reference to violated standards. From this point of view the movement can certainly be understood and enjoyed on its own terms. But the invited comparison between the unique pattern and the normal one leads to an awareness of the tension between them that sharpens one's perception of the extent to which Haydn has here widened the boundaries of his own style.

III

Stravinsky's preoccupation with the contrast between the idioms of earlier periods and those of his own is most obvious in works like *Pulcinella,* based on frankly borrowed materials; and one can certainly learn much about his methods from the way he adroitly and often comically reworks his sources. My concern, however, being the composer's use of stylistic and formal conventions, I have chosen a work

based on a Classical model but without actual thematic quotation: the Symphony in C.

Unlike Haydn, Stravinsky could expect his audience to be more familiar with the musical language of the past than with that of the present — familiar enough, at any rate, to draw certain conclusions from the information furnished by programs he could normally (again unlike Haydn) expect them to be reading. What they would find there — the announcement of a symphony openly characterized as tonal, with four movements following the traditional order — would suggest a conservative, not to say reactionary, pastiche. (What they might have read previously in popular accounts of Stravinsky's "retrogression" would only confirm this surmise.) But these signposts would prove to be misleading guides for the unwary; and Stravinsky (this time like Haydn) may well have hoped that the more alert among his listeners might gain added enjoyment from the interplay of the anticipated and the actual.

Certainly the traditional framework is emphasized here: the Classical orchestral layout, the diatonic melodies, the metric regularity, the apparent harmonic simplicity, the ostensibly typical patterns. At the same time, any expectation of a work easily comprehensible in a comfortably familiar idiom is defeated, even for the most sanguine hearer, by certain immediately perceptible features: the distinctive instrumental sound; the persistent, though mild, dissonance; the sudden harmonic shifts; the peculiar heterophonic part-writing (most obvious in the second movement). Now, the simple filling-out of a Classical mold with contemporary stuffing could produce nothing more important than a parody in the manner of Prokofiev, but Stravinsky's intention is serious. He confronts the evoked historical manner at every point with his own version of contemporary language; the result is a complete reinterpretation and transformation of the earlier style.

A convincing demonstration of Stravinsky's method depends on closer analysis, for which I have chosen the opening *Moderato alla breve*. The traditional model here is clearly the sonata form; and as in the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies of Beethoven, an introduction adumbrates the first theme, which appears in proper form at m. 26. But the first measure, even as it (probably intentionally) recalls the opening of the Fifth, contradicts its ancestry by its reiteration, not of the dominant, but of the leading-tone; and the role of this leading-tone in the movement to come is one of the clearest indications of Stravinsky's intent. For the shock of

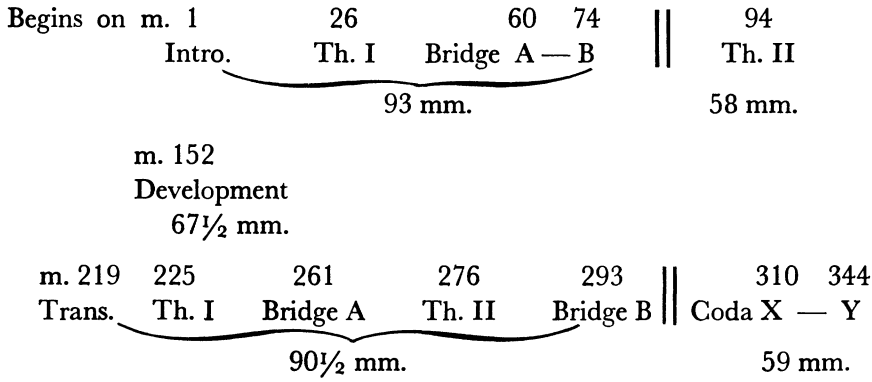
this apparently incongruous detail is not produced for its own sake, or for the purpose of parody; it calls attention to the fundamental tonal ambiguity of the symphony: the tendency of B to act as a dominant rather than as a leading-tone. The consequent struggle between E and C is evident throughout the introduction, and the tonic established with the appearance of the theme in m. 26 retains the E as the bass of its first inversion. The E asserts its strength later at many crucial points: at the end of the exposition; at the false recapitulation, heralded by the establishment of the leading-tone of E; throughout the first half of the coda. Even the final chords of this movement and of the entire symphony retain the inverted form.

Another example of the new perspective on older procedures is the presentation of the first theme, recalling as it does the corresponding passage in Beethoven's First Symphony with its I-II-V sequence. With Beethoven the movement from each degree to the next is a clearly functional harmonic step; with Stravinsky these movements sound less like true progressions than like his characteristic harmonic shifts. There are several reasons for this effect. In the first place, the C-E ambiguity casts doubt even on the solidity of the tonic. This doubt extends to the dominant, which is also suspiciously tinged with the E coloring. Then there is the peculiar phrase-structure: extended, repetitive developments over an *ostinato* so nearly static that harmonic inflections within each phrase sound like incidents in the part-writing. Owing to the consequent absence of unambiguous harmonic cadences, clear phrase-divisions must be achieved by interruption and even by interpolation, as in mm. 39-42. As a result the function of the supertonic statement thus prepared is obscured, in contrast to the corresponding harmony in the Beethoven, unequivocally established by an applied dominant. When Stravinsky's dominant arrives (m. 48) it is heavily colored by the previously noted E. What we hear then, suggests the stepwise shift of I-II-III as an alternate and even more persuasive interpretation of an ostensibly functional I-II-V.

This typically Stravinskyan kind of harmonic motion explains much that happens later in the movement. Just as the I-II step of m. 43 is already hinted at in the inner voices of m. 30 and prophesied even more clearly in m. 35, so is it reflected on a large scale in mm. 61-93. This time the tendency of II to become a dominant is encouraged; but when the expected theme arrives, another stepwise shift takes place, silently as it were: IV replaces the long-prepared V. This substitution in turn

permits another series of shifts (mm. 120-28), as a result of which V finally makes its appearance.

Perhaps the most interesting of Stravinsky's transformations is that of the sonata form itself. The Moderato adheres only superficially to the canons; its fundamental rhythm is of a different order. The clue is to be found in a striking crescendo that occurs twice. In the exposition, it is part of the bridge that heralds the second theme (mm. 74-93); in the recapitulation, now cut completely out of the accordingly reduced bridge, it recurs, suitably transposed, as a preparation for the coda (mm. 293-309). The passage is all the more noticeable for the sudden pause that follows it each time, and its displacement cannot go unremarked. This parallelism between two passages that, in the usual sonata movement, would not correspond, points to a unique structure. Accepting the pauses as important points of articulation, I suggest the following divisions, more natural for this movement than the standard ones, and startling in the close parallel of their proportions:



(Notes on the above:

1. I have included the transition of mm. 219-25 in the recapitulation, because it furnished an upbeat to Theme I corresponding to the introduction.

2. I have included a few measures of upbeat each time as the beginning of Theme II.

3. In spite of the empty measure at m. 148, I have regarded the next three measures as constituting the cadence of the exposition. There is a close parallel here to the end of the movement.)

The balance of the movement, then, is not of exposition against recapitulation, but rather of the exposition on the one side against the

recapitulation plus coda on the other. Not only does the second theme in the exposition balance the coda, but the internal divisions of the two sections show close parallels. The second theme, beginning in IV, moves to V at m. 128, the resulting division being 34-24 measures (of which the last three are cadential chords). The coda is divided by the reappearance of Theme I in the proportions 34-25 measures (of which the last five are cadential chords).

The subdivision of Theme II in the exposition brings to light another structure, one even more at odds with the progressive development inherent in the Classical form. Embedded within the more obvious parallel balance is a completely symmetrical layout:

Intro.	Th. I	Bridge	Theme II C	—	D
25 mm.	34 mm.	34 mm.	34 mm.		24 mm.

This fails of being a perfect arch by only one measure. Nor is this all. The shortened and altered recapitulation is susceptible of less subdivision than the more relaxed exposition, and I think that the score here can be shown to justify the cluster of Transition-Theme I-Bridge A as one group and Theme II-Bridge B as another. If these are accepted, the entire movement takes on the shape of a huge arch. Such a symmetrical ordering paradoxically appears to contradict the previously outlined balance of parallel sections; yet the composer undoubtedly meant this alternative plan to be heard. The correspondence of the beginning and the end is apparent, for both Theme I in the exposition and Coda X are divided by pauses into twice 17 measures. An analogous pause in the recapitulation at m. 243, now the most obvious articulation in Group I, produces a division matching that of Theme II in the exposition. These subdivisions, indicated by parentheses, underline the symmetry of the following plan, in which each leg of the central arch is itself a smaller arch:

Intro.	Th. I	Br.	Th. II	Dev.	Group I	Group II	Coda X — Y
25 mm.	34 mm.	34 mm.	58 mm.	67½ mm.	56½ mm.	34 mm.	34 mm. 25 mm.
	(2x17)		(34 + 24)		(24½ + 32)		(2 x 17)

The development is, of course, virtually twice 34 measures. This is the middle of the movement, and perched square on the center (mm. 181-90) is the false recapitulation! The proportions of the movement are thus roughly:

$$5 - 7 - 7 - 12 \underset{(7+5)}{-} 14 \underset{(2\times 7)}{-} 12 \underset{(5+7)}{-} 7 - 7 - 5$$

A close examination of the phrase-structure will disclose, even in the details, a remarkably consistent adherence to ratios derived from these numbers.

What is the importance of all this? It is twofold. First, a scheme of this kind affords a clue to the problem of Stravinsky's harmonic rhythm, since it offers a rationale for his choice of turning-points between harmonic areas. Further, it indicates a reason for Stravinsky's interest in the 18th-century framework. The Classical balance of phrases and periods, so carefully adjusted to the demands of functional tonality, becomes an analogue for the organization of his own kind of diatonicism. But the typical Classical balance, even when apparently rigid, controlled contrasting events moving at varying speeds, so that the listener's experience usually belied the exact parallel of the time-spans and defeated most attempts to measure one against the other. Stravinsky's sections — rhythmically persistent, harmonically static, melodically circular — not only invite the hearer to make the comparisons leading to just such measurement, but also reward him for doing so. Far from exploiting the sonata form as the traditional vehicle for realizing the musical or dramatic potentialities of tonal conflict and progression, he adapts it to his own perennial purpose: the articulated division of a uniform temporal flow.

IV

Haydn was attacking certain conventional presuppositions of the Classical style from the inside, since he had grown up within it — or rather, it had grown around him. Almost every moment in his quartet movement represents a questioning, a reexamination of these standards, and in every case the solution avoids the obvious on the one side and the arbitrary on the other. It is a narrow path, but one that Haydn maintains successfully to his goal: a broader redefinition of his own style.

Stravinsky, approaching the Classical from outside, as a historically defined manner, superficially follows its conventions more closely than Haydn. The influence of his personal idiom, however, is so strong that the resulting reinterpretation goes far beyond that of the earlier composer. The result is not an extension but a transformation of his model.

Now, it is interesting to see the same kind of force at work when Stravinsky turns to an idiom of his own day. When he uses the twelve-tone method it is again, so to speak, as an outsider adopting a historically defined mode. Since what he is now appropriating is not a generalized

plan of formal organization but a detailed technique that necessarily influences the choice of every note, the analogy must not be pushed too far; still, it will be instructive to contrast briefly Stravinsky's handling of a few aspects of the new conventions with that of one who had eminently developed them.

By the time Schoenberg came to write his late works, he was manipulating his tone-rows in a way that, while very free, nevertheless always respected the basic structural role of the series. In the String Trio, for example, the ordering of the notes varies greatly in detail, but the fundamental hexachords are rarely violated. Again, Schoenberg feels under no compunction to state the entire row in canonical form at the outset, so long as its basic properties are clear. In the Phantasy, Opus 47, the appearance of the second hexachord is delayed until m. 10, and only in mm. 32-33 is the row given its first unequivocal statement. But these apparent licenses reveal the interaction between the general method and the specific formal demands. The second hexachord punctuates an important phrase-division, and the entire row underlines the brief reprise that closes off the first section. Throughout these works, the important divisions of phrases, periods, and sections are emphasized in just such ways; and both the twelve-tone texture and the rhythmic shape gain clarity by this mutual reinforcement.

In the case of Stravinsky's *Movements* for Piano and Orchestra, it is obvious from the start that his use of the system is divergent. After an initial statement, the row is promptly obscured — obscured in such a way by orchestral doublings, note-repetitions, and changes of order that its profile becomes unclear and its structural function doubtful. Doubtful it should be, for in m. 7 there emerges a series (not of twelve tones, for there are many repetitions), motivically related to but derived in no conventional way from the original, and vying with it in importance. The new series is completely stated three times during the first half of this movement, only to disappear into the tone-row from which it came. At this point it is already evident that Stravinsky's concern with the twelve-tone system is more with its vocabulary and texture than with its structure. Earlier, the Classical framework was an aid in the control of a preponderantly diatonic language; now the new mode offers an even closer control of chromaticism, and serves as a source of material as well.

The real structure, now as before, remains his own. What that is can be seen most clearly through his use of well-defined instrumental

colors to mark important divisions: the trumpet that precedes and follows the piano's initial statement; the contrast of the three statements of the subsidiary series — piano virtually alone, flute, and piano with plucked strings; the sustained 'cello harmonic that closes the section; the trombones that begin the second half. Stravinsky is proceeding here, as before, with clearly marked portions of time, but his former harmonically static blocks of sound have given way to a more pliant, elastic, chromatic polyphony. Look for example at the three strokes of the harp that accentuate the pauses in the piano line of m. 42. These form a kind of instrumental *ostinato* by the introduction of a static, unifying tone-color; at the same time they are moving in pitch— in fact, they are inaugurating a new statement of the series. Again, the transitional passages connecting each movement with the next are sometimes clearly explicable as twelve-tone units, sometimes not; but they are always easily perceptible instrumental units, set off from the main body of the work as contrasting blocks, and each orchestrally differentiated from the others.

Occasionally Stravinsky reverts even now to a true pedal or *ostinato* (although less frequently than in *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni*). Here again a comparison with Schoenberg may be of value. The passage beginning with m. 40 of the Phantasy shows how an *ostinato* accompaniment figure can be logically introduced within a twelve-tone context. The melody in the violin runs through one hexachord; the *ostinato* in the piano is based entirely on its complementary inversion. The *ostinato* is composed of two two-note motifs, to which a third motif is soon added; in terms of the row, they are made up of elements 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 respectively. Thus within each hexachord the ordering is preserved; and because the hexachords are mutually complementary, no casual doublings can occur in spite of the continued *ostinato*. When the melody moves on to another hexachord, the accompaniment shifts correspondingly.

Contrast this technique, developed from the exigencies of the system itself, with that of Stravinsky in *Movements* IV, which throws the piano part into relief against a series of static four-note chords in string harmonics. Each of these chords is derived in the same way: by the sustaining of elements 3-4 and 7-8 of a stated row (retrograde-inversion the first and third times, inversion the second). Thus the ordering is not preserved, for these four notes are not normally adjacent. Furthermore, since complete statements are sounded against each chord,

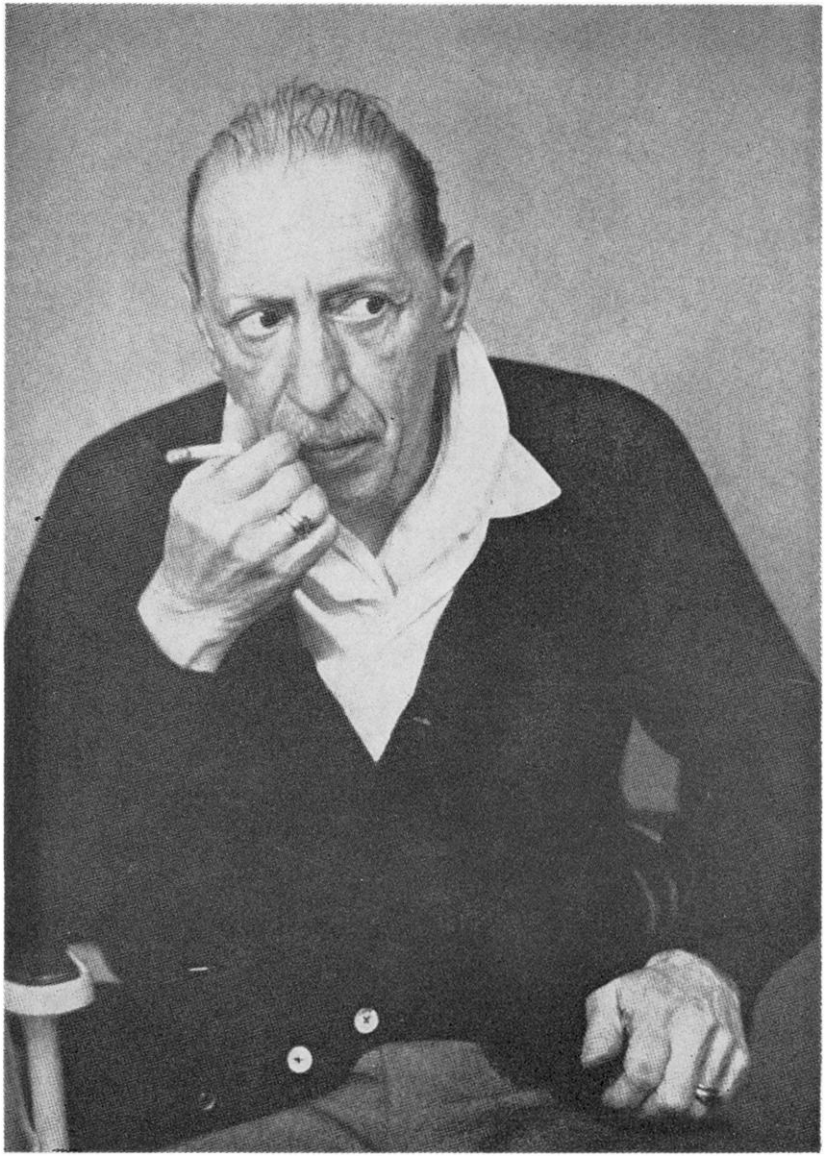
fortuitous doublings are inescapable. Unlike the Schoenberg *ostinato,* which defines a thematic phrase by completing the twelve-tone aggregate, these act as harmonic poles to support a symmetrical division into three time-blocks. It is ironic that this movement, the clearest of all in its derivation from the tone-row, should depart so far in its over-all structure from usually accepted twelve-tone ideals.

V

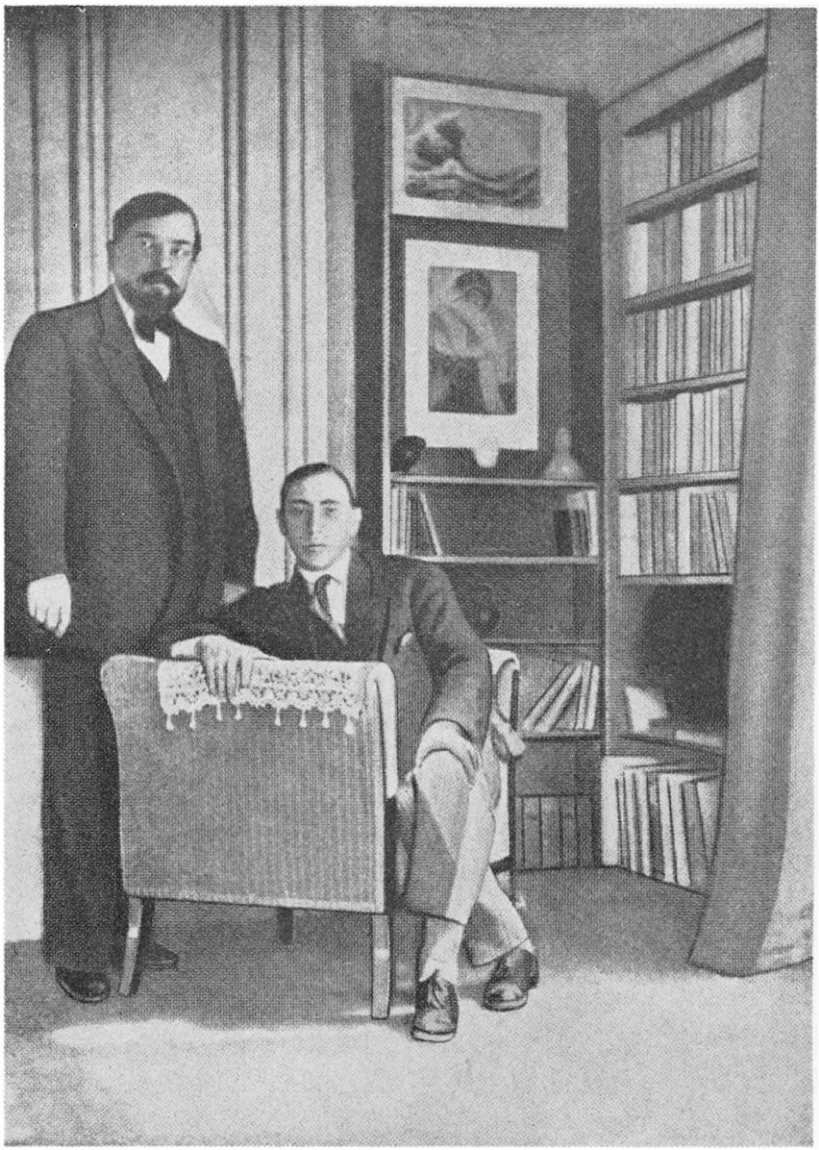
The contrast between Schoenberg and Stravinsky is roughly analogous to the one involving Haydn. Schoenberg, like Haydn, modified the conventions and extended the techniques of his musical language from within — from the vantage ground of one who had played a preeminent role in the shaping of the language in the first place. Stravinsky, approaching each from without, reinterprets and transforms it so radically to fit his own needs that it remains only superficially related to the original.

If this were all, Stravinsky would have become at most an interesting mannerist, and an inconstant one at that. But this is not all. What has been omitted — or only hinted at up to now — is of crucial importance: the relation of manner and mannerism to style. Style is the vitality that comes from the integrated and balanced interaction of all the dimensions of an art. By manner I mean a style, whether of the past or of the present, viewed reductively as rigidly defined and historically restricted. Mannerism is the result of the personal appropriation of such a manner, with the frequent concomitants of exaggeration, distortion, and fragmentation. What Stravinsky has demonstrated convincingly is the feasibility of putting manneristic elements to good use in the service of a powerful style.

This discussion has been misleading insofar as it has implied that Stravinsky's borrowings from past and present and their distortion at his hands are the chief sources of interest in his music. I now suggest that exactly the reverse is true: that the fate of these adopted elements, although a matter of legitimate esthetic concern, is nevertheless secondary to their real value: their influence on his own highly individual musical image. With Stravinsky, as with Haydn and Schoenberg, the contrast between the expectations aroused by the accepted conventions and the actual use to which they are put produces tension — but with Stravinsky, the resultant pull is in a different direction. In listening to the Haydn



Igor Stravinsky



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and Schoenberg examples we are engrossed by the way in which the personal style is constantly reshaping the general convention. We should hear Stravinsky in just the opposite sense: what is of prime importance is how the borrowed convention extends and modifies the personal style.

We have already come to hear the neo-Classical works in this way, and that is why the Symphony in C and other compositions of its period are now, after years of attack as parodistic pastiches, being recognized as masterpieces. No doubt one day we shall be able to hear the recent works in the same way. Stravinsky's style is too strong and too individual to permit long disguise. To watch it preserve its identity through all its adventures is endlessly fascinating.